

RETAIL ADVERTISING METHOD

Background of the Invention

5 (1) Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to a method for advertising in retail establishments and in particular to a method for displaying selected electronic information and advertisements viewable to prospective buyers when entering the establishment, or when in the establishment.

10 (2) Description of the Prior Art

Product suppliers, in particular consumer goods manufacturers whose products are sold through supermarkets and other retail establishments or stores, often enter into advertising agreements with the store, or with a group of commonly owned stores in which the store agrees to advertise the manufacturer's products. Such agreements are used in particular with consumer packaged goods, i.e., products packaged in cans, cartons or other containers by the manufacturer.

For example, supermarkets may prepare weekly newspaper inserts to advertise products that are on sale during a given week. These leaflets and other advertising media employed by supermarkets are often expensive, offer a limited number of goods, and require advance notification by the manufacturer of products to be advertised. Similar programs are used in other retail establishments, including department, specialty, automotive, and hardware stores. As used herein the term "advertisements," while particularly including product depictions, such as photographs

or graphical images, is also intended to include all types of product information that a supplier wishes to advertise to prospective customers.

Perhaps of major importance is the fact that such advertisements are received by the prospective customer at home or at another non-store location, often one or more days before the customer may actually come to the retail establishment or store. As a result, unless the sales material is brought to the store, the customer may not recall that particular items are on sale.

Stores may also use point-of-sale materials such as in-store signage to advise the prospective customer of on-sale items. However, in-store signage is expensive to prepare, install, and later remove. Also, only a limited amount of in-store advertising material can be placed at a given retail location before the shopping area becomes cluttered.

Thus, there is a continuing need for a way to acquaint prospective customers with new and on-sale items. In particular there is a need for advertising such items in an in-store or on-premises manner so that the prospective customer will be exposed to the advertisement at the time of the purchase opportunity. There is especially a need for a method of this type of advertising that can be conducted economically and which will enable the retailer to quickly make changes in the advertisements.

Summary of the Invention

In modern retail establishments, such as supermarkets, checkout lanes or counters are provided for use by customers in paying for selected merchandise. While historically these checkout lanes included a cash register to total the price of the goods

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purchased, modern checkout lanes use a computer terminal with a monitor and a means for scanning bar codes carried by the goods. While the terminal can include a keyboard or keypad for use by the operator, entries at many terminals are now made, at least in part, by the use of touch screens, with various commands being entered by touching images on the monitor screen.

In addition, many retail establishments, in particular supermarkets, now have self-service checkout lanes in which the store operator oversees a plurality of checkout lanes. Each checkout lane includes a customer-operated checkout terminal with a monitor. However, entries are made by the customer using a scanner, keypad and/or a touch screen, instead of by a store employee.

As a result of the adoption of these innovations, many supermarkets and other retail establishments now have an area of the store that includes a plurality of checkout terminals with monitors that are placed in a conspicuous location, such as adjacent the store entry and/or an aisle way used by prospective customers, such as when entering the store. Often, at least some of these terminals are temporarily unused.

The present invention takes advantage of this fortuitous proximity by displaying selected advertising materials on the screens of these checkout monitors when the terminals are otherwise not in use. More specifically, the present invention provides a method of displaying advertising materials, such as product images, on these screens as a screen saver during periods of inactivity of the checkout terminals.

Generally, the present invention includes the steps of selecting advertisements to be displayed electronically, compiling a screen saver program comprised of the selected advertisements, and displaying the screen saver on one or more checkout terminal monitors. Additional steps may be included in the method, depending on the manner in which these steps are implemented.

In one embodiment of the invention, the store enters into agreements with various product suppliers, the term being used herein to include manufacturers, intermediaries between the manufacturer and retailer, and advertising agencies and other entities acting on behalf of manufacturers or such intermediaries, to advertise selected products during a specified time period on the screens of checkout monitor terminals in one or more retail establishments managed by the retailer. The retailer then compiles, or contracts with a third party to compile a database of advertising material and other product information relating to the selected products, e.g., images of the products. These images are then stored on a server as a screen saver program, and transferred to the monitors for display as a screen saver during the specified time period during periods when the monitors are otherwise unused.

For example, the advertising material can be stored in a server or terminal connected by a local area network or LAN to the checkout terminal, so that the advertising material is displayed as a screen saver on the checkout terminal monitor when the monitor has been inactive for a given period of time. If the advertising materials are only to be displayed on one terminal, the software database can be transferred to the hard drive of the checkout terminal.

Alternatively, an advertising material supplier or compiler can prepare a screen saver program comprised of selected information corresponding to products to be advertised in accordance with agreements reached with product suppliers. The compiler can then provide a copy of the database to a store, or to a plurality of stores, for display on checkout terminal monitors, paying the store or stores for the opportunity to display the material, while collecting advertising fees from the suppliers.

The selected database may be comprised of graphic images of the products offered. These images may be obtained, for example, from a master database containing a large number of graphic product images provided by manufacturers for advertising purposes. An example of a master database that can be used for this purpose is the Kwikkee Systems database, of Multi-Ad Services, Inc. Alternatively, still or animated advertisements can be assembled into one software display for sequential or random display of the advertising materials as a screen saver.

The database is compiled using screen saver software, several software programs being commercially available, by adding the images, e.g., in EPS, GIF, JPEG or TIFF format, to the program database, and selected the time and other parameters to be used in displaying the images. Some or all of the images may be animated. The screen saver program may also include music, announcements, or other recorded sounds to be played with the display of the images. The compiled program can be saved, e.g., as a .scr file, or an executable file.

If the program is compiled in-store, the program can be saved on the store server, with the selected checkout terminals being programmed to display the screen saver after a predetermined period of inactivity. If the program is compiled at a remote location, such as at the location of an independent compiler, the completed
5 program can be transferred electronically to the store, e.g., by email or over the Internet, or sent to the store on a disc or CD.

Brief Description of The Drawings

Fig. 1 is a schematic of a first embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 2 is a schematic of a second embodiment of the invention.

10 Fig. 3 is a schematic of a third embodiment of the invention.

Detailed Description of The Invention

Fig. 1 illustrates an embodiment of the invention in which selected advertisements are identified in communications between one or more suppliers 10 and store 12. The list of selected advertisements is then provided to an independent
15 entity, referred to as a compiler 14, who acquires images or other advertising materials from one or more internal or external databases 16. Compiler 14 then assembles the acquired advertising materials into a screen saver program that is transmitted to store 12. Store 12 then stores the program on a server 18 within the store's computer system, where the program is accessed by one or more terminals 20 for display on the
20 terminal monitor 22.

It will be appreciated that the number of suppliers and/or the number of terminals may be different than illustrated. Also server 18 may be a dedicated CPU or other data storage device, e.g., the hard drive of a computer used by the store manager.

Fig. 2 illustrates another embodiment of the invention in which the screen saver is compiled internally by store 12. In this embodiment, like the preceding embodiment, store 12, in communication with suppliers 10 selects products to be advertised. Store 12 then assembles images or other advertising materials from one or more databases 16, and compiles the advertising materials into a screen saver for storage on server 18 and display on monitors 22 of checkout terminals 20.

In a third embodiment of the invention illustrated in Fig. 3, compiler 14 communicates with product suppliers 10 to select products to be advertised. Compiler 14 then selects images or other advertising materials from databases 16, and assembles the materials into a screen saver program, which is provided to stores 12 for storage on server 18, and display on terminals 22 of monitors 20.

Thus, the method of the present invention provides an additional opportunity for manufacturers and other product suppliers to advertise their products at the point of sale, while providing retailers with an opportunity to generate revenue from an unused resource; namely, the monitors of inactive checkout terminals.

Certain modifications and improvements will occur to those skilled in the art upon a reading of the foregoing description. It should be understood that all such modifications and improvements have been deleted herein for the sake of conciseness and readability but are properly within the scope of the following claims.